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THE SITUATION IN JORDAN, 24 SEPTEMBER 1970

Amman: The army plans to make a determined effort today to push the fedayeen off the hills of the capital and into the center of town. This will be hard on the restaurants and movie theaters, I expect. Zaid Rifai told the embassy they will use 20,000 men, including some infantry this time, to wipe out the last pockets of resistance. Rifai appears to be aware that this will be a tougher job than the army originally expected. Rifai said the government is doing its best to restore public services, but the Embassy is still fending for itself.

Amman airport: The far end of the air strip at Amman airport is still in range of fedayeen mortars, but the evacuation planes are getting in and out without trouble. The main problem appears to be collecting the people who want to leave in time to meet the plane schedule.

MORI/CDF per  
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Hostages: The Palestinian Red Crescent Society has announced in Bern that it now has custody of the airline hostages in Jordan. The announcement noted that the hostages were well but are subject to the hazards and conditions of the war zone. We cannot confirm a report that the hostages have been taken to the Syrian border area. The Israelis, meanwhile, have reiterated their refusal to exchange any convicted Arab terrorists for the hostages.

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ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

State Dept. review completed

NSA review completed

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c Attached to IS cover memo, H15-E313A7

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Northern Jordan: The Palestinians in Irbid are again surrounded,

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The fedayeen have rockets, anti-tank weapons and land mines, but they have nothing to counter the artillery that is pounding them from the heights around the city. The Israelis think the Syrians are holding the option of returning, but this does not seem likely.

Our own analysis is that the Syrians determined in advance that they would limit their involvement to the armored, mechanized and artillery units already stationed near the border. Since these outgunned the available Jordanian tanks by more than two to one, they probably expected to eliminate the Jordanian armor, seize the main roads, and support the fedayeen units in Irbid, Mafrag and the other northern towns.

The Syrians had the element of surprise as well, and in the almost continuous battles on Saturday and Sunday they pressed the Jordanian tanks very hard. Had they concentrated on breaking through to the south, they might well have made it. Instead, they seem to have divided their force to relieve Irbid as well, giving the Jordanians a chance to recover and bring in their aircraft. Jordanian artillery on the heights overlooking Israel was turned around and used to good effect, and their tanks rallied and dug in. The Syrians also suffered from notoriously poor maintenance, and by Tuesday their operational tanks were no longer a match for the Jordan army, whose tank force had been reinforced. The Israeli build-up probably had some effect on shortening the Syrian incursion and may have had something to do with deterring them from using their own aircraft. It is more likely, however, that the Syrians wanted to keep their involvement a deniable one, at least until they and the fedayeen had complete control of the north. A Palestinian armored division is one thing, but a Palestinian air force is just too big a lie for even the Syrians to try. When it became clear that they were not going to break through, we think they decided to cut their losses and withdraw. The Soviets were leaning on them all this time, and if nothing succeeds like success, it is also true that nothing fails like failure, and they had clearly failed.

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